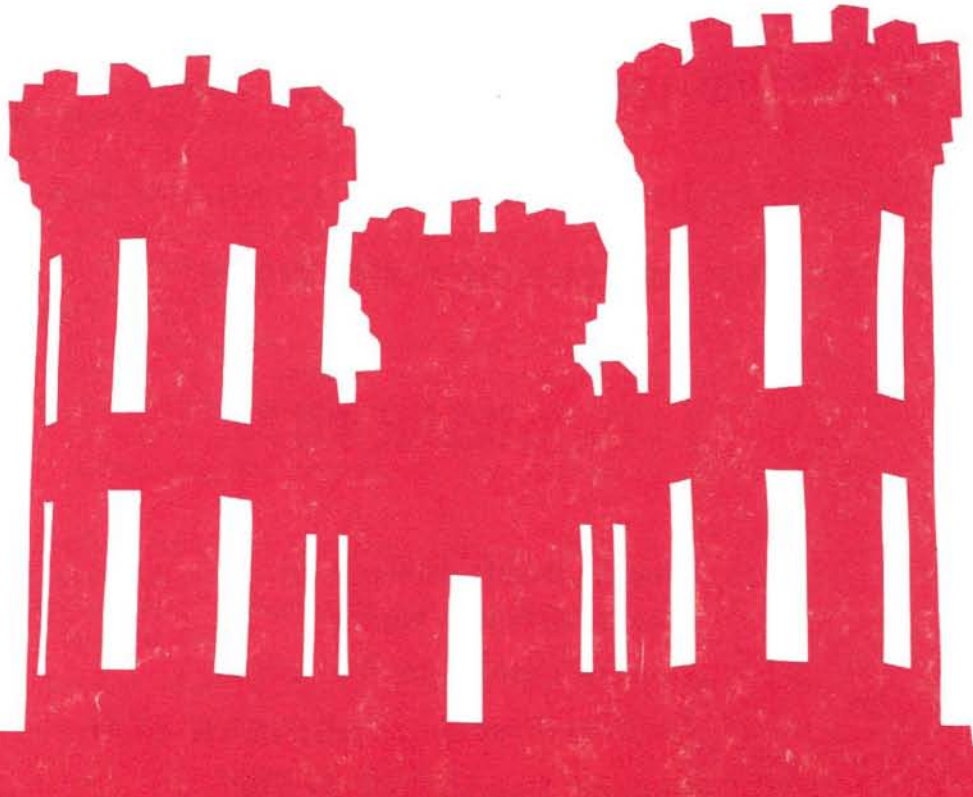
THE ENGINEER

JAN FEB MAR 1977

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL



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VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1 JAN FEB MAR 1977

FEATURES

6 **ANTI-TANK DITCH**/LTC Frederick A. Perrenot

11 **TRAINING NOTES**/ENGINEER STAFF

12 **AN AIRFIELD FOR YFC**/CPT Michael P. McCann

18 **AN AUTOMATED CARTOGRAPHIC SYSTEM**/Ellen K. Cramer

20 **PIONEERS AT NORMANDY BEACH**/Norm Covert

24 **OPERATION SNOW-GO TO THE RESCUE**/SP4 Bob Small

30 **EMPS—OFFICER'S ROADMAP**/MILPERCEN

36 **SUPPORTING TODAY'S ELECTRICAL ARMY**/ LTC Mark H. Magnussen

40 **WHAT GOES UP — MUST COME DOWN**/SP4 Jack Frear

45 **EXPEDIENT SUSPENSION FOOTBRIDGE**/ CPT Timothy P. Drozd

DEPARTMENTS

1 **Chief's Briefs**/History —

2 **Pipleline**/News Items

4 **Stop 16**/Letters to the Editor

10 **Tactical Problem**/ENGINEER STAFF

47 **Helping Hands**/Civil Action

48 **ENGINEER POTPOURRI**/ENGINEER BRANCH

52 **BRIDGING THE GAP**/Career Notes

OPERATION SNOW -GO TO THE RESCUE

SP4 Bob Small

"Gentlemen, you came to our city and fought aggressively to help us overcome this disaster. You gave of yourselves and proved to the world that the U.S. Army is a force 'for the people.' "As you leave the city of Buffalo the hearts and best wishes of its citizens go with you. On behalf of the citizens of Buffalo, I, Stanley M. Makowski as mayor, declare Feb. 8 as 'Brigade Day.'"

The mayor of the northern city made this declaration to the more than 300 Ft. Bragg, N.C., soldiers who participated in operation "Snow-Go." Their mission was simple—dig out the snowstorm-ravaged city of Buffalo which was experiencing the worst winter ever.

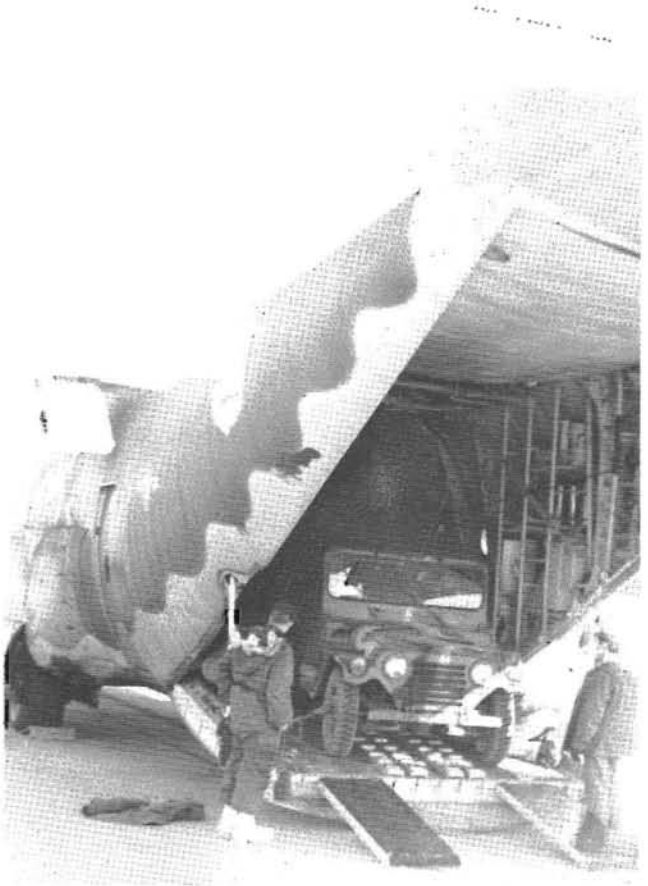
During January of this year snow fell on Buffalo every day leaving total accumulation of more than 60 inches of snow. An average temperature of 13 degrees for the month, added to the problems. As the blizzard continued, high winds blew over the city causing low temperatures and enormous snow drifts. The local street maintenance departments began losing the battle with mother nature. Eventually winter's grip on the city left many of its automobiles as well as citizens stranded.

Many cars soon became mere snow piles in the city streets. Drifts reached heights previously uncommon to the area. In the suburbs some drifts reached as high as telephone wires. One man was seen sitting on top of a traffic signal which normally would have been in the middle of an intersection.

It became impossible for any vehicles, emergency or otherwise, to make their way through the city. Citizens could not leave their homes to go anywhere. Many were even stranded at their places of business.

National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve troops were called in to assist in snow removal operations. But the snow kept falling and the situation became desperate.

Thomas R. Casey, of the Federal Disater Assistance Administration was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to coordinate efforts with



the state of New York in close evaluation of the situation, which worsened by the day, Casey called on active Army units to join the effort.

Mr. Casey contacted the First U.S. Army Disaster Control Element and requested assistance. First Army notified the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORCOM) of the request.

On the morning of Jan. 29, FORSCOM asked XVIII Airborne Corps and Ft. Bragg headquarters for a list of all engineer equipment available to assist in the snow removal operation. Within hours, the 20th Engineer Brigade (Combat) (Airborne) provided the list and placed the equipment and personnel in "ready" status.

Soldiers of the 20th Engineer Brigade's 27th and 548th Engineer Battalions and of the 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) began winterizing their vehicles.

In the early afternoon of Jan. 31, FORSCOM notified Ft. Bragg officials to deploy all available resources immediately. At that time, the Corps Emergency Operations Center was activated.

What was the troops' reaction? "I had calls from everyone from privates to sergeant major telling me they wanted to go to New York," said Second Lieutenant Debra L. Palmer, assistant adjutant at COSCOM's 46th General Support Group Headquarters. "When troops found out we were looking for Buffalo natives," she added, "some people tried to change their home of record so they could go."

Prior to departure the troops underwent preparations for overseas reassignment (POR). This process gave those deploying the opportunity to execute wills and powers of attorney if needed. Also, change of address cards were completed for the redirection of mail. Letters were sent to wives of members deploying, explaining how and where they could get assistance of any type during the spouses' absence. Finally, each departing member filled out a Hometown News Release Form so news releases could tell the folks "back home" where they were going and what they were doing.

After the troops completed this portion of POR they were issued cold weather gear. The equipment included wool fatigues, insulated underwear, snow glasses to cut glare, complete parkas, heavy mittens and insulated boots. The soldiers were also briefed on cold weather and details of the mission.

Equipment that was to make the trip received careful attention. Road graders, bucket loaders, dump trucks and wreckers were checked to insure the proper level of anti-freeze was maintained.

"I had equipment operators coming to me and begging to let their equipment make the trip," said Captain George J. Captain, assistant S-3 in the 27th Engr. Bn. "There was one guy who had a vehicle that couldn't pass inspection. He worked on that thing all night and finally moved out on the 35th flight. The equipment was lined up in convoy order and inspected by personnel from the 264th Engineer Company, also of the 20th Brigade, before departing for Pope Air Force Base's Green Ramp. Once at the Air Force Base the equipment was weighed and readied for flight. Air Force personnel from the 3d Aerial Port, Pope AFB assisted in preparing equipment and personnel for flight. They were responsible for getting equipment onto the aircraft and insuring that it was tied down securely while in transit.

Within 13 hours of the initial notification, an advance party of 32 soldiers was on its way by C-130 Hercules aircraft to Buffalo. This party was made up primarily of 20th Engr. Bde. staff members so that the forward operations center in the Buffalo area could be established as soon as possible. The main body of troops and equipment began departing Pope AFB seven hours later in 37 separate flights. Five Air Force C-5A Galaxies, 8 C-141 Starlifters and 24 C-130 aircraft carried the load. The C-5A aircraft flew to Pope from Dover Air Force Base, Dover, Del. to do the job. McGuire AFB N.J., and Charleston AFB, S.C., supplied the C-141 Starlifters.

By the evening of Feb. 4, 322 personnel and 68 pieces of equipment (750 tons) had been airlifted and were in Buffalo assisting in relief efforts.

The equipment included 13 bucket loaders, 12 road graders, 10 - 5-ton dump trucks, 8 - 1/4-ton trucks, 7 - 5/4-ton trucks, 5 - 2 1/2-ton cargo vehicles, 5 wreckers, 4 - 5/4-ton contact trucks, 2 - 49-ton fuel trucks, 1 - 12-ton tilt bed and 1 - 5/4-ton ambulance.

The troops and equipment were transported 740 miles from Ft. Bragg to Niagara International Airport. This airport is located 18 miles north of Buffalo and a few miles south of the U.S.-Canada border. As they arrived they convoyed to the city to begin work.

In addition to below-freezing temperatures, several factors contributed to the hazardous and uncomfortable working conditions for the soldiers. First, driving winds seemed to push snow back onto streets as fast as they were cleared. In addition, stranded automobiles cluttered the streets and made total clearing impossible.

To aid the clean-up effort Mayor Makowski imposed several traffic bans which prohibited all

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but "essential traffic" on the city streets. Violators were subject to fines of up to $500 and jail terms of up to 90 days.

After two days of work the crews began to make noted progress. The workers had moved more than 3,500 cubic yards of snow. They cleared two of the city's three main streets which had once been clogged with snow, slush and automobiles. The weather also seemed to be on their side now. Heavy snow that had been falling on the city for weeks stopped and the driving winds became quiet. Operation "Snow-Go" pushed on faster than ever.

By Feb. 5 the Army engineers had moved more snow than expected and were far ahead of schedule. The operation was expected initially to take 10-15 days. It became apparent that the troops would be leaving sooner. Even though they were this far ahead of schedule, the task force didn't slow down a bit. Bucket loader and road grader operators took the opportunity to do something extra. In addition to clearing streets, they pitched in and gave citizens a hand at opening driveways and parking lots.

"I didn't mind opening driveways for the people," said one bucket loader operator, "the people needed the help and I wanted to do anything I could."

At one point in the operation, a bucket loader operated by Specialist 4 Timothy Goodwin, 27th Engr. Bn., traveled 14 miles to Amherst, N.Y., for a job. The "bucket" worked for hours opening fire and emergency exits at St. Francis Home, a nursing facility for the aged.

The weather remained calm and operation "Snow-Go" came to a close. When the final piece of equipment pulled out of Buffalo Feb. 7, 1977, 22 miles of roadway were clear. The traffic ban had been lifted and city traffic was flowing smoothly for the first time in months.

The unsung heroes of operation "Snow-Go" should not go unmentioned—the men who worked day and night to keep the equipment on its feet and ready for anything.

The 1st COSCOM provided 20 mechanics who worked on the equipment at Niagara International Airport and the National Guard Armory in Buffalo. In addition, COSCOM set up and maintained its own operations center which was manned by personnel from the 46th Support Group. Several members of the 330th Transportation Center provided redeployment support including assisting Air Force personnel in securing equipment on the aircraft.

The people of Buffalo showed their appreciation for the soldier's assistance in several ways. During the evening hours when the wind was howling and temperatures dropped to their lowest, citizens did what they could to comfort the troops. People came out of their homes carrying cakes, cookies and coffee to offer tired workers. Many soldiers were invited into homes for meals and just a warm place to relax.

Private George Richus, a grader operator in the 27th Engr. Bn., recalled, "It was late at night and the grader began to shake a bit, telling me that it was about time for it to break down. Sure enough, it did, right in the middle of the street. The trouble was minor, nothing to worry about. But these people came out of the house across the street to see what was wrong. When I told them, they insisted that I come into their house and have a cup of coffee to warm up. Needless to say, I did."

Buffalo gave 30 of the troops an unforgettable trip to Niagara Falls. The soldiers also visited the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant, the largest hydro-power plant in the free world. Following the tour, they were hosted to an Italian dinner at a Buffalo restaurant.

Another 40 soldiers went to a professional basketball game featuring the Philadelphia 76ers against the Buffalo Braves.

Soldiers and equipment began departing Niagara International Airport for Ft. Bragg, Feb. 8. The redeployment ran as smoothly as the deployment. Forty flights returned them to Ft. Bragg: C-5A Galaxies made 5 trips, C-141 Starlifter 3 and the C-130 Hercules aircraft the remaining 33.

Many of the soldiers didn't want to leave Buffalo. "I kind of liked it here," said one tired 27th Engineer trooper. "It gave us all a sense of purpose and the people were very receptive." "What makes the soldier 'go' is the genuine sense of appreciation," the commander remarked. "In a disaster situation people turn to one another for help. The troops felt the urgency to do their part. When they know the citizens are behind them, and wish them well, it soon becomes more than a job."

"You may forget what you did here," Mayor Makowski said in bidding farewell to the troops at the airport. "But let me assure you that our people *will never forget* how you searched your hearts and shared your kindness with us."

Specialist 4 Robert Small is assigned to the Public Affairs Office at Fort Bragg, North Carolina where he works as an Information Specialist.